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1 October 1974

Series 13

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MEMORANDUM FOR: D/DCI/IC

SUBJECT: Southeast Asia Trip Report, 1-21 September 1974

1. When I think of Southeast Asia, I am reminded of a man peering through a kaleidoscope. He carefully picks it up, looks through the eyepiece and gradually the myriad colors begin to take recognizable shape and forms. And just at the moment when the viewer is about to deliver a grave pronouncement concerning what he is seeing, someone comes along and jostles his arms. The viewer looks again but the entire picture within the kaleidoscope has changed.

2. And so it is with Southeast Asia. Each person, American and Asian alike, forms perceptions of what he believes represents reality. Each view is somewhat different from that of his neighbor. And even the views of the individuals constantly change -- with the tides of war, with the state of the economy, with the effect of the northeast and southwest monsoons on one's psyche, and perhaps a hundred other variants.

3. When thinking of the future of Southeast Asia, it is also common to go through fits of depression punctuated by moments of optimism -- to be buoyed up by the Western concept of straightline progress or to lapse into the shoulder-shrugging fatalism brought about by contemplating the Buddhist wheel of life.

4. I recently spent three weeks in Southeast Asia on an area refamiliarization trip. During that period I was in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand, travelled up-country as well as visiting their capital cities and talked to a large number of U.S. country-team members and foreign nationals. From my observation of the countryside and the battlefields and from the conversations I held, I formed judgements concerning the present situation in Southeast Asia and the substantive questions which are uppermost in the minds of the intelligence community. I offer them for what they are worth as my very personal judgements, and emphasize they represent no one's views other than my own.

Colonel, USMC

Attachments: 1 - South Vietnam, September 1974
2 - Cambodia, September 1974
3 - Thailand, September 1974
4 - Trip Itinerary and List of Personnel With Whom Discussions Were Held

REGISTRY FILE

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- The Capability of RVNAF to Defend RVN. The VN's regular armed forces are the equal of the NVA/VC. By the nature of the war, i.e., RVNAF defending SVN while the NVA/VC select the targets to be attacked, the Communists will continue to experience local headline-catching successes. However, these initial successes will be rectified by RVNAF counteractions. An example of the kind of action and response which can be expected in the future was seen in the recent military operations in Quang Nam where this type of scenario was played out.

- There is one qualifier to this assessment of the South Vietnam regular forces. Hanoi retains six divisions in North Vietnam. Should they be deployed to South Vietnam, it is unlikely that the RVNAF will be able to contain them without U.S. air support.

- The State of the Regional and Popular Forces. The condition of the RF and PF program is deplorable. The concept simply is not getting off the ground. With a few notable exceptions, the RF and PF are not willing or able to resist the encroachments of either regular or guerrilla forces.

- The effectiveness of the RF/PF program is crucial to the future of RVN. There is no way that the handful of RVNAF divisions can maintain order and stability in South Vietnam without a rigorous RF/PF to control the countryside and suppress local insurgent efforts.

- Breathing new life into the RF/PF program must be one of the GVN's highest priorities. The GVN is aware of the problem and some pilot programs to put more fibre into the RF are being undertaken. Examples of this are General Nhuts' (2d ARVN division) plan to integrate an RF regiment within his division and General Lahn's (Marine Division) interspersing RF elements among his Marine units to give the former more fibre.

- But these are "quick fixes." The RF/PF program needs much more than this.

- Will Hanoi Conduct a Major Offensive in 1975 of the Same or Greater Intensity than 1968/1972? Arm-chair strategists take various positions on this question. That element of the RVNAF military leadership located closest to the point of the sword shrug their shoulders and say they simply don't know.

- This is not a reflection of their disinterest in the question. Rather, it is a measure of their realism.

- In effect what they are saying is that they know what the Communists' military capability is -- they can commence their offensive tomorrow. However, they are unable to answer the questions concerning intentions because the indicators are not yet present.

- My judgement is that Hanoi has not yet made up its mind. The purpose of the Communist attacks of the past three months has been to test and attrite the RVNAF.

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NUMBER OF PAGES: <u>16</u> DOCUMENT NO. 	25X1	
NUMBER OF ATTACHMENTS: <u>4</u>		

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REMARKS

Bill - This is an unusually fine trip report by used, by the IC staff. It covers his recent visit to SA Asia.

It warrants your scanning interest.

Mary Thacker
18-E-74
10/22/74

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Remarks:

Is the RF/PF
really that bad,
or does he have
an exalted idea
of its "concept"?
The rest is very
good

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10/25/74